

INCARNATION OF JAPANESE COLONIZATION IN INDONESIAN AND KOREAN LITERATURE: COMPARATIVE STUDIES OF AMAL HAMZAH AND HYUN JIN-GEON'S WORK

RATHIKA WIJAYANTI¹

Universitas Indonesia, Indonesia

ABSTRACT

The similarity experience of colonial history shapes the Indonesian and Korean writers of the Japanese colonial period have a strong sense of resistance, anti-colonization of Japan, and the spirit towards nationalism and independence, as it appears in the author's work of Amal Hamzah (Indonesia) and Hyun Jin-Geon (Korea). Therefore, this study aims to answer the question of how the historical context of Amal Hamzah and Hyun Jin-Geon influences both works, how the portrait of Japanese colonization and its resistance is portrayed in the work of these two authors, and how the similarities and differences of the works from the two authors presented.

The method used in this study is descriptive, qualitative with comparative literary theory. Swingewood's literary sociological approach is used to see how the historical context of Japanese occupation influenced the short stories of Amal Hamzah and Hyun Jin-Geon. The results show that the similarity of themes in the work of these two authors supported by the similar historical context of Japanese colonization. In addition, various themes that criticize and insinuate the injustices caused by the Japanese government to also become a strategy of resistance to colonization which is implicitly used by these two authors to raise people's awareness to gain the independence.

KEYWORDS: Japanese Colonization, Indonesian And Korean Literature, Comparative Studies & Resistance

Received: Jan 02, 2018; **Accepted:** Jan 22, 2018; **Published:** Mar 01, 2018; **Paper Id.:** IJELAPR20183

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

Indonesia and Korea have a common historical background due to the Japanese colonialism. This historical likeness ultimately leads to the same emotional scars felt by both Indonesians and Koreans. Korea undergoes long suffering due to the Japanese colonization for 35 years in 1910-1945. Although not as extensive as Korean, Indonesia was in the same period occupied by Japan that is from 1942 to 1945. Japanese settlement ended with the surrender of the allied block at the end of World War II (1945).

Japanese policies are pressing for both Indonesians and Koreans. For 35 years, the Japanese have made a cruel colonialism against the Korean people. With its military power, Japan annexed land, food, natural resources, and human resources (labor). Japan also issued a policy of abolishing the homogeneity of the Korean nation to destroy Korean history and culture. Activities related to art and art performances were forbidden. In Japan's efforts, Japan forbade the use of Korean in schools and forced the use of Japanese names in lieu of Korean names. In

¹ The author is an awardee of Lembaga Pengelola Dana Pendidikan (LPDP) scholarship. This research is supported by LPDP.

addition to the exploitation of land, human resources, and culture, Japan also exploits women either as sex slaves (*Jungun Ianfu*), servants or as nannies.

It also goes for Japanese policy in Indonesia. Although in terms of language, Japan allows the use of Indonesian language, but in terms of culture, various literary and artistic works were limited. At this time, the Center of Culture, Keimin Bunka Shidoso, stood under direct Japanese supervision. The institute is intended to gather writers and artists who can be utilized for the benefit of the Greater East Asia War. Therefore, this institution provides repression in the form of a harsh censorship of literary and artistic works published. Works that contain anti-Japanese elements are strictly prohibited. Jassin (1993: 13) reveals that the period of Japanese occupation is a time that brings out the feelings of hope, anxiety, fear, hatred and resentment. However, the works that present those feelings are censored entirely by the Japanese. Furthermore, Jassin (1993: 14) asserted that freedom of thinking in the Japanese period did not exist.

The arrival of Japanese, which was originally assumed to bring a positive impact for Indonesian, given they successfully defeated the white people, turns out to be their camouflage for their own interest. The three-and-a-half-year period was a time of worry and disappointment because of Japanese's sweet nothing. Apparently precisely as what Loomba (2003: 2) says that colonialism as a conquest and control over the land and other people's property, is actually not just a mastery of material aspects such as land and objects but the control over the man himself. Therefore, at this time, the revolutionary soul of Indonesian literature was brewed.

These experiences ultimately push the writers and artists from the Japanese colonial period, both in Indonesia and in Korea to possess its own style. The elements of resistance, anti-colonization of Japan, and the spirit towards nationalism and independence began to emerge in the work. Various themes that criticize and insinuate over the injustices caused by the Japanese government are so prominent. Attempts to raise public awareness of the suffering caused by Japanese occupation are implicitly poured into the work, as appears in the work of the Indonesian author, Amal Hamzah, and Korean author Hyun Jin-Geon.

Therefore, this article will attempt to examine how the historical context of Japanese colonialism experienced by two writers from two different countries with similar historical backgrounds, Amal Hamzah and Hyun Jin-Geon, can produce works with the same nuance.

RESEARCH METHODS

The method used in this study is a qualitative descriptive method with comparative literary theory as the tool to review how the similarities and differences between the two works in this same historical context are presented. Swinge wood's literary sociology approach which states literature as a social document is used in this article to see how the historical context of Japanese occupation influenced the short stories of Amal Hamzah and Hyun Jin-Geon.

Additionally, the sociology of literature is also used to see how these two writers present criticisms of injustice and suffering experienced by both Indonesians and Koreans during the Japanese colonialism. This is in line with the principle in the approach of literary sociology which always sees the interrelation of the literary aspect with sociocultural. *First*, the relationship with the literary aspect as a sociocultural reflection, and *second*, study the sociocultural influences on literary works. The first aspect is related to the problem of literary reflection, while the second aspect relates to the concept of influence (Suwardi Endraswara, 2003: 93). The data source used in this research is short story of Amal Hamzah's work entitled *Bingkai Retak* and *Teropong* as well as Hyun Jin Geon's short story entitled *Gohyang* (*Hometown*) and *Bincheo*

(*The Poor's Wife*).

Theory of Comparative Literature

Contemporary context equations allow two authors in different countries to produce works of the same nuance. This, of course, is not the question that one author refers to another, but more to how the repressions age influenced the creation of the work so that it produces two works of the same nuance. This makes the prose of Indonesia (the work of Amal Hamzah) comparable to Korean prose (Hyun Jin-Geon's work) since both of them experience the same historical context, namely Japanese colonization. Damono (2009: 3) explains that comparative literature is a literary study of a nation that has links with other nations. Past historical events such as colonization often inspire authors to reflect on historical events both in their own countries and in other countries.

The comparative assessment of two works from different countries can be based on the universality of the theme raised. In situations of colonialism themes such as injustice and suffering are themes that seem almost universal anywhere in the world. Referring to the opinion of Budi Dharma in Fajar (2015: 185) that this universality becomes a sign of global apathy and understanding has in common. The borders of the state that these universal values can pass by show that the practices of work creation can be related.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The Historical Context of the Author and His Work

Amal Hamzah and Hyun Jin-Geon are the two authors born in the midst of the struggle of suffering caused by the Japanese occupation. Both produced works that portrayed the portrayal of society's ironic life as a result of the Japanese colonization. As a young-minded writer, the critical force made both authors rise from the Japanese empty promises that were later reflected in his works. Jassin (1993: 22) analogized Amal Hamzah as a young soul who then jumped from the world of idealism into a world of materialism during the Japanese colonization. Meanwhile, Hyun Jin-Geon is the author who is critical of Japanese colonization and becomes one of the pioneers of modern Korean literature that carries the flow of realism.

Hyun Jin-Geon (1900-1943) first published his short story entitled *Huisaenghwa (Flower Burial)* in 1920. In 1921 Hyun Jin-Geon published a short story titled *Bincheo (Poor Men's Wife)* and in 1926 he published the *Gohyang (Hometown)* short story. These short stories are published in *Gaebyeok (Genesis)* magazine. This magazine is a Korean magazine that is separated from the shadow of the Japanese government. This magazine is also a symbol of the presence of modern Korean mass media during the Japanese occupation that carries the identity and style of Korea apart from Japan. The publication of Hyun Jin-Geon's work in this magazine is the marker of Hyun Jin-Geon's role in voicing Korean nationalism.

In the course of his career, Hyun Jin-Geon is very massive in voicing anti-Japanese. He became the daily editor of *Dong A Ilbo*, a daily marker of the revival of the Korean Independence Movement of March 1, 1919². He was imprisoned for his actions in the 1936 *Iljangki Malso* event and it eventually ruined Hyun Jin-Geon's career in the world of journalism. Growing up in a period of Japanese occupation filled with difficulties and sufferings resulting in Hyun Jin-Geon's work in

² Ministry of Culture and Tourism, 2012, *Korea: Dulu dan Sekarang*, Information and Cultural Services, Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Tourism.

a theme of poverty, suffering, and helplessness. The rigors of colonial life can still be felt even though he was born in a wealthy family.

Meanwhile, the misery of the young intellectuals who were not given freedom of mind during the Japanese occupation was also experienced by Amal Hamzah. Amal Hamzah who was born on August 31, 1922 is the younger brother of the poet Amir Hamzah. Amal Hamzah's work has been influenced by Amir Hamzah's romance. However, during the Japanese exploration, Amal Hamzah's work became more cynical and sarcastic. This change becomes a form of Amal Hamzah's response to the Japanese government who only gave false promises to Indonesia. Jassin (1993: 33) reveals that Amal was a young poet who initially directed his work to idealism such as Amir Hamzah and the author of his idol figure, Rabindranath Tagore. However, during the Japanese occupation, his poems and other articles changed course into rebellious, hateful, and vengeful.

Two works of Amal Hamzah that indicate his cynical is *Bingkai Retak* and *Teropong*. Both of these short stories are included in Amal Hamzah's anthology entitled *Pembebasan Pertama*. This anthology was published in 1949, but the work in it is a work collected from 1942-1948. In these two of Amal Hamzah's works, his disillusionment with the rigors of life, the environment, and the people around him are so visible. Amal Hamzah seems to be undermined by skepticism from his own colleagues who actually worked for the Japanese government under the Cultural Institute. Meanwhile, for people like him who refuse to be under Japanese rule, there seem to be no way out. The impact of his disappointment on the Japanese government made these two works of Amal Hamzah to be cynical and critical, as Jassin (1993: 22) says that for Amal Hamzah there is no compromise with the people around him. Amal Hamzah seems to be a form of resistance to the Japanese government by voicing his disbelief in the people around him.

Portrait of Japanese Colonization in Amal Hamzah and Hyun Jin-Geon's Works

The arrival of Japan to Indonesia in fact does not necessarily release the Indonesian nation from the suffering of other nation colonization. Indonesian nation as if freed from the grip of the lion and then into the mouth of the tiger. Japan with the promises of Prosperity Asia Raya initially gave hope to the Indonesian people, that the white people can actually be defeated. However, Japan actually provides new repression for the nation of Indonesia either in the exploitation of natural resources, human, and cultural colonization. As a result, the Indonesian people must feel again the pain of poverty and hard to find a job.

This is also due to Japanese policy in monopolizing natural resources for the benefit of war. Japan established a strict economic system and turned agriculture into industry for the benefit of war. As a result, many farmlands are abandoned. The people lack food and clothing because all the resources are transported Japan for the benefit of war. Portrait of poverty is what appears in the *Teropong* short story.

In *Teropong* poverty is illustrated by the attitude of the characters in it. This poverty is characterized by the scarcity of rice and how difficult it is to get a mouthful of rice at that time. The railroad setting became the backdrop for the narrator to observe the harshness of life in the Japanese colonial era, as shown in the following quotation.

““Berbagai-bagai omongannya, tetapi kebanyakan omongan berputar saja tentang hal beras. Beras, beras, dari kota aku sudah diikuti oleh perkataan yang lima huruf ini, yang berarti dalam kehidupan manusia di sini, hidup atau mati.” (Hamzah, 1979:77)

“Various talks, but all of them revolves around rice. Rice, rice, even since the city I have been followed by this

four letter words, in which for the humans here meant as the case of life and death.” (Hamzah, 1979:77)

From the above quotation it appears that for people in the train as people of Indonesia, rice is a source of livelihood that is expected. Rice scarcity indicates the poverty they are experiencing. The fact that both character “aku” and the narrator must confront that the people on this train are people with suffering and a hungry stomach.

In addition, this poverty is also illustrated by the narrator's observation of a Chinese female character in a train that has a Sundanese female helper.

“Di mukaku duduk seorang perempuan Tionghoa dengan anaknya kira-kira berumur lima tahun (...) Seorang babu bangsa Sunda menjaganya, sedang anak kecil itu berdiri di muka jendela.” (Hamzah, 1979:76)

“In front of me sit a Chinese woman with her child, probably around five years old (...) A Sundanese helper as the nanny is watching out for the child, meanwhile the child himself stands facing the window.” (Hamzah, 1979:76)

From the depiction above, the Chinese woman was described as a wealthy person, while the native person is perceived as a maid. This fact seems to illustrate how the Indonesian nation during the Japanese occupation is a poor nation who must rely on immigrant to survive. Hamzah's deeds in his observations seem to confirm that the natives do not become masters in their own country.

Institution of Culture becomes the subtle way of Japan in controlling both literature and art for the benefit of Japan. Many young writers who are aware of Japanese facade and are reluctant to write to Japanese orders cannot find a suitable job. As a result, many young intellectuals are ultimately finds it hard to obtain decent jobs.

This fact is implicitly portrayed through “aku” character. There are lifestyle changes that occur in my character especially about the use of money. Previously the “aku” character was very generous to spend money like the one in the following quotation.

“Dahulu ada seorang perempuan penjual endok asin. Acap kali kalau aku dan kawanku (ah, berapa tahun yang lalukah

gerakan, waktu itu aku masih duduk di bangku sekolah) pergi ke Pasirleunjang, kami borong endok asin semua. Seperak dua perak kami bayar, tidak peduli berapa banyaknya telur itu (...) bahwa kami mesti membeli endoknya semua, dengan harga yang berlebih-lebihan. Yah perlu apa wang (uang) kalau tidak untuk menyenangkan hati.”
(Hamzah, 1979:77)

“There was a women who sells a salty eggs a while ago. Each time my friend and I (ah, how many years ago I wonder, at that time I was still in the elementary school) went to the Pasirleunjang, we bought all the salty eggs. One-two cents we paid, No. matter how many the purchased eggs (...) we just had to buy all the eggs, with the exaggerating cost. Money well spent, money is for pleasure, what else.” (Hamzah, 1979:77)

However, when times have changed he becomes too cautious in spending his money. There is more caution to something that may have escaped his attention, that money should not be wasted in a time of trouble, “*Aku tiada membeli apa-apa, selain dari kantungku kosong, sengaja telah sipatku tidak suka berjalan-jalan,*” (I buy nothing, because aside

from my empty wallet, I also do not fancy shopping) (Hamzah, 1979:78).

Teropong that is published in the Japanese colonial period as a reaction of Amal Hamzah to the Japanese government that at the time seemed to provide prosperity for the nation of Indonesia. Amal Hamzah's Reaction is a portrait of reality occurring within society in the form of poverty and powerlessness in the face of hunger. The people who sleep with their stomach growled; that is how the people in the colonial period lived as described by Amal Hamzah.

As well as *Teropong*, *Gohyang (Hometown)* also displays this portrait of poverty with full of irony. The Japanese occupation of Korea for 35 years resulted in prolonged suffering. Japan's tactics of annexing Korean people's land have resulted in the Korean people losing their own land. As well as what is experienced by the people of Indonesia, Koreans also experience poverty that is even more alarming.

In *Gohyang* the portrayal of poverty due to the annexation of this land is illustrated by telling strange men to the narrator on a train from Daegu to Seoul. Just like Amal Hamzah, Hyun Jin-Geon also presents a portrait of people's suffering due to Japanese colonization through the landscape of travel in a train. Portraits of injustice due to the annexation policy by the Japanese government appear in the following quotation.

"(...) para manajer menengah mengambil bagian mereka, para petani hanya mendapatkan tiga persen dari hasil mereka. Sejak saat itu, ungkapan-ungkapan seperti "Aku sekarat" "Aku tidak bisa terus" keluar dari bibir mereka bagaikan mantra seorang biksu Buddha." (Hyun Jin-Geon in Djajadiningrat, 2014:33)

"(...) the middle manager took their part, the farmer only get third percent of their outcome. Since then, the words such as "I am dying" "I cannot go through" come out of their lips as if a Buddhist monk spell." (Hyun Jin-Geon in Djajadiningrat, 2014:33)

From the above quotation it appears that the Korean royalty, especially the peasants, suffer so much from the injustice they experienced. They have to work hard, but the Japanese government that get the benefits instead, from that annexation system.

The infertile land conditions in Korea are also adding increasingly to the suffering experienced by the Korean people. This hunger and poverty becomes a picture of how the Korean people slumped during the Japanese occupation, as seen in the following quotation.

"Mereka meminjam sedikit uang untuk bibit dari orang lain dan mencoba untuk bertani, tapi musim gugur datang, mereka kehilangan semuanya (...). Dan kemudian saya kehilangan ibuku. Dia berbaring sekarat tanpa menyicipi satu sendok pun bubur nasi putih." (Hyun Jin-Geon in Djajadiningrat, 2014:34)

"They borrowed a little money for seeds from others and tried to farm, but autumn came, they lost everything (...). And

then I lost my mother. She is dying without be able to taste one spoon of white rice porridge." (Hyun Jin-Geon in Djajadiningrat, 2014:34)

In Hyun Jin-Geon's portrayal, the most suffering felt from this annexation policy is the peasants. Hyun Jin-Geon seemed to present an ironic picture of how peasants would have to die of starvation on their own land before they could

enjoy their own product. Hyun Jin-Geon explicitly conveyed the tragic nature of Korean people, especially the peasants, as a result of Japanese arbitrariness.

Theme as a Resistance Strategy Against Colonization

The two authors of different backgrounds who experience the same kind of oppression of Japanese colonization show similarities in expressing ideas through their short stories. Although with different styles, but both show the form of resistance to colonization through the same theme for the short story.

In *Bincheo* Hyun Jin-Geon packs a portrait of poverty in a touching story. This story tells a life story of a couple who lived in deficiencies and must sell one by one of his goods to meet the daily needs (meals). The choice to retain idealism as a writer must apparently be paid with a life of inadequacy.

In relation to its historical context, during the Japanese occupation, many authors and journalists who maintained their ideals by supporting the rise of Korea (the events of March 1, 1919) had to face the Japanese government's strict rules of not getting jobs even imprisoned. This is what ultimately makes the young Korean intellectuals in the Japanese occupation must be trapped in idle circumstances because his work is prohibited to publish. Portrait is what appears in the short story of *Bincheo*.

"I hadn't been bringing in any money for the past two years, and since we couldn't just starve to death, she'd had no choice but to cart all of our furniture and clothing to the pawnshop or leave it standing in a corner of the scrap yard in exchange for cash." (Hyun Jin-Geon in Sora Kim Russell, 2013:4)

In the quotation above, it appears that the characters in this short story are powerless to face the injustices of the times that strongly reject idealism. Poverty is a means of exchange that K and his wife must face in order to preserve his ideals as a writer.

In addition to poverty, colonization also spawned the helplessness and weakness of humans living in wartime. Amal Hamzah and Hyun Jin-Geon present the reality faced by humans in the form of disappointment, hatred and mockery of hypocrisy during the Japanese colonial era in *Bingkai Retak* and *Bincheo*.

In *Bingkai Retak* themes of disappointment, hatred, and ridicule are implicitly displayed in the life story of the householder *aku* character and his wife who have more income than him. People in this short story is a manifestation of the helplessness of young intellectuals who during the Japanese occupation facing difficulty in getting a job even vacillated in the uncertainty of the times. People in this short story are figure who is desperate with circumstances that are not in accordance with his idealism.

"Maka ia pun menjadi seorang yang mati kemauan, mati cita-cita dan mati nafsu untuk bekerja. Baginya dunia ini telah

berhenti berputar dan ia hidup hanya untuk menunggu malaikat maut datang meminta nyawanya." (Hamzah, 1979:72)

"So he became willpowerless, have no ideals and passionless for work. For him the world has stopped spinning and he lives only to wait for the angel of death to come ask for his life." (Hamzah, 1979:72)

In the above quotation it appears that the figure in *Bingkai Retak* has lost his passion for work. If associated with the circumstances of the times, Amal Hamzah seemed to want to display the image of humankind during the period of colonization that is so vacillated as an era and they lost the passion to try.

Furthermore, criticism of hypocrisy is also featured in this short story. This hypocrisy appears in the depiction of the main character. When viewed from the narration, the character in this short story is a person who works in prisons are paid by public money, but he does not work for the community. In spite of this, he was merely a follower of less obvious work. However, in the presence of others he wants to look great and authoritative.

“Mukanya selalu dimasukkannya, keningnya dikerut-kerutkannya agar orang lain selalu menyangka, bahwa ia memikirkan masalah-masalah hidup yang musykil-musykil yang tak terpecahkan oleh ahli-ahli filsuf dunia.”

(Hamzah, 1979:73)

“His face was always glum, his forehead wrinkled so that others always thought, that he was thinking about the problems of life that cannot be solved by the world’ philosopher.” (Hamzah, 1979:73)

Amal Hamzah seems to present criticism that many people during the colonial period were hypocritical. They seem to do a great job that can save the nation, but in reality all for their own sake. This criticism is in accordance with the context of the way the Japanese seduce the nation of Indonesia by offering prosperity and independence, but in fact all the efforts of the Indonesian nation used for the benefit of Japan instead.

Meanwhile Hyun Jin-Geon in *Bincheo* also shows his criticism of the hypocrisy of the people in the top who always show happiness but behind it all actually they are not much happier than the poor such as K.

“After my sister-in-law’s husband made that money off of rice futures, he’d been spending his days and nights going around to pubs and *gisaeng* houses and had taken up with one *gisaeng* in particular and was running amok. When he did show his face at home, he tormented everyone and would beat my sister-in-law at the drop of a hat. This time, as well, he had flown off the handle over nothing and hit her with the dinner tray, giving her that black eye.

“See, that’s what happens when people have money,” I said.

“It’s true. Getting along well with your spouse, even when you have to go without a lot of other things, is real happiness,” my wife said earnestly.” ((Hyun Jin-Geon in Sora Kim Russell, 2013:17)

Just like Amal Hamzah, Hyun Jin-Geon also seems to portray how this colony produced hypocrites, people who are only material happiness oriented and forget the real happiness of freedom.

Japanese colonization is displayed implicitly in *Teropong*, *Bingkai Retak*, *Gohyang*, and *Bincheo* has led to emergence of human beings who experienced suffering. The characters in Amal Hamzah's short story portray starvation of humans because of the shortage of rice, who are sleeping on trains with rumbling stomachs, as well as displaying portraits of humans full of hypocrisy. Likewise, the characters in Hyun Jin-Geon's short story are the peasants who must experience ironic tragedy in which they must experience death without having time to eat rice porridge from their own land.

CONCLUSIONS

From the author's short story analysis, Amal Hamzah and Hyun Jin-Geon, it appears that both have similar backgrounds. First, in *Teropong* and *Gohyang*, they both chose the train as their background. Amal Hamzah showcases the complexity and density of humans in the carriages from Jakarta City to Banten, while Hyun Jin-Geon prefers the quiet and serene atmosphere of the train that is only filled by four passengers whose four represent the symbols of their respective countries - Korea, Japan and China. Meanwhile, *Bingkai Retak* and *Bincheo* also have a similar event, which is about the life of a husband and wife in addressing poverty and hypocrisy. However, both have different perspectives and conflicts.

This difference can show the attitude of the two authors in reacting to the Japanese colonization. Amal Hamzah is harsher and naturalist by presenting a chaotic state, while Hyun Jin-Geon is more symbolic and realistic to convey the tragic nature of the Korean people. If viewed from the period of colonization, it could be that the Indonesian people who colonized for several years with empty promises of independence after previously colonized for so long by the Dutch, are so disappointed with the Japanese so the tone chosen by Amal Hamzah is a tone of harsh disappointment. While for Hyun Jin-Geon, the span of 20 years (the time context of the short story creation) of Japanese occupation seems to have wearing-out the Korean nation hence their exhaustion. In such a state of devastation, Hyun Jin-Geon seeks to awaken the resurgence of the Korean people through a portrait of tragic realities.

From the comparison of the work of these authors, it appears that the context of the Japanese colonial era really had a major effect on these two authors. The similarity of the historical context seems to produce the similarity of nuances that exist both in the short story of Amal Hamzah and Hyun Jin-Geon.

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